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SPOTLIGHT ON CIA

What It Is... What It Does

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What It Is . . . What It Does

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Interview With William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence

Mr. Colby's first involvement in intelligence work was in the Office of Strategic Services in World War II. He then earned a law degree from Columbia Law School, and in 1950 joined the CIA. He served in Rome, Stockholm and Saigon, and as head of the Agency's clandestine services. He became Director of the CIA on Sept. 4, 1973. He appears, at right in photo, in the conference room of "U. S. News & World Report."

Is spying on enemies and friends, or subversion of governments, immoral? Mr. Colby was invited to visit the magazine to give editors his first comprehensive interview dealing with CIA's worldwide operations.

Q. Mr. Colby, many people around the world question the moral right of the Central Intelligence Agency to spy on friendly countries, as opposed to countries that are potential enemies of the United States. How do you answer that?

A First, it's hard to distinguish so clearly between friends and potential enemies, as over our history a number of countries have been both. But basically the question comes down to the concept of state sovereignty and the right of a country to protect itself, which have long been recognized as part of international relations. That includes the right to carry out such operations in the world as are believed necessary for self-protection.

I think that moralists over the years have accepted some degree of clandestine work as part of the normal relationship between states. In any case, is spying any less moral than developing great weapons systems, or many of the other things that nations do in their self-interest?

Q. How do you decide whether to operate in a friendly or neutral country?

A The decision concerning any intelligence operation is determined by the answer to four questions: What is the importance to our nation of the intelligence result being sought? What is the risk of exposure? What would be the impact of exposure? And how much does it cost?

In most open societies, you don't have to conduct clandestine operations to get information. So you would be foolish to run the risks and absorb the costs of a clandestine mission. Obviously, in a friendly country the adverse impact of exposure would be very great. So that is a very negative factor. But there will be situations in some parts of the world where a well-conceived, low-risk operation is necessary to get some information which could be terribly important to us.

Q. What about covert operations such as the one the CIA conducted in Chile before the overthrow of Allende?

A Again, it's a matter of the United States taking a decision that a certain course of action is important in the best interests of our country, and friendly elements in another one. There have been exposures before. The U-2 [spy plane] operation, of course, is a notable example.

Q. Do you, as the Director of the CIA, decide that a covert operation, such as against Chile, should be conducted?

A These decisions are very carefully structured. The authority for them stems from the National Security Act. This authorizes the CIA to carry out such other functions and duties related to foreign intelligence as the National Security Council may direct.

Furthermore, we explain to our congressional oversight subcommittees in general how we propose to use the funds that are appropriated annually for the CIA. We provide the most-sensitive information and have no secrets as far as these subcommittees are concerned. I don't necessarily describe each operation in each country in detail, but if a member of these subcommittees asks what we are doing in any particular country, I'll give him a full and fair picture.

Q. Who actually makes the decision that a covert operation should be undertaken?

A The actual operation is approved by a committee of the National Security Council—the Forty Committee. If there is high-level policy concern about the situation in some country, we in CIA look at it and see what we might do that would help implement national policy. Then we go up to the National Security Council and say, "Here is what we think we can do to carry out the general policy with regard to that country." If the proposal is approved, we go ahead and carry it out.

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I'm not suggesting that CIA has been pushed or shoved into undertaking actions of this sort; it's part of our job.

Q. Is clandestine activity the major element in CIA activity—even in these days of détente?

A To answer that question, we have to stand back and examine what the United States intelligence "community" includes. It embraces the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the intelligence services of the Army, Navy and Air Force, the intelligence units in State, Treasury and the Atomic Energy Commission, and the FBI. All of these agencies collaborate on the intelligence job.

After all, intelligence consists essentially of the collection of information—by overt, technical and clandestine means—the assessment of all this information, and deriving conclusions and judgments about what is going on or is likely to go on in the world.

In 1971, President Nixon said that the Director of Central Intelligence should take a leadership role in this whole effort. And I've tried to do this.

Essentially I have four jobs:

One of my jobs is to be head of the intelligence community. Apart from the CIA, I don't have full authority over these other agencies, but I do have certain influence on them because of my responsibility to report on what they are doing.

A second job is running the CIA.

Third, I have to be substantively informed about situations around the world so that I can provide briefings, information and assessments to the National Security Council.

Fourth is the job of acting as a kind of public spokesman and handling problems like our recent troubles.

Now, to get back to your question: By reason of the way the community is structured, clandestine activity, most of which is clandestine collection rather than covert political or similar action, does represent a considerable percentage of CIA's activity. But if you measure it against the whole of the intelligence community, it's a rather small percentage of the total community effort.

Q. Has détente changed the character of your work or reduced the need for clandestine intelligence?

A I wish it would. If you get to the logical end of détente, then we would have established a relationship with the Soviet Union of mutual respect for each other's strengths, so that our differences can be negotiated about rather than fought over. This, in turn, should encourage the Soviets to believe that they ought to be more open with their information. But that's not the situation now.

Today the Soviet attachés can go to almost any newsstand in this country, pick up a copy of a technical aviation or space magazine, and from it learn a vast amount of detail about our weapons systems. Unfortunately, we have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to get comparable information about the Soviet Union. We couldn't fulfill our responsibilities to Congress and the nation unless we did spend those millions of dollars gathering that information.

Q. There is pressure for CIA to restrict itself to the collection of foreign intelligence such as you've described, and abandon covert operations—that is, aiming at the overthrow of governments. How do you react to that idea?

A Given the state of the world today, the Capitol would not collapse tonight if the CIA were not permitted to conduct such covert operations any longer. In fact, we do considerably less of these than we did during the worldwide confrontation with the Soviets and the expansionist drive of the Communists in the 1950s. And we do considerably less than during the period in the '60s, when we were dealing with Communist insurgency and subversion in a number of countries. Changes in the world situation and our national policies have decreased such activities. We still do some; but covert actions of this type are a very small percentage of our total effort at the moment.

Q. Why is it needed at all?

A There are a few situations where a little discreet help to a few friends of the United States or a little help to a few people espousing a certain policy or program in a foreign country can enable us to influence a local situation in a way that may avert a greater crisis in the future.

And times change. We might be faced with a real need for early, quiet influence against a rising threat, which otherwise we might have no alternative than to meet by force later. We no longer want to send the Marines to such situations. I think this flexible tool is important to preserve so that we can use it if we have to.

Q. Do you assume that undercover agents from friendly countries are operating in the United States?

A Certainly I do. The FBI has identified a number in the past.

You have to recognize that, in dealing with a lot of countries around the world, it's accepted that we all engage in the clandestine gathering of intelligence. Nobody gets emotional about it. It's been going on since Moses sent a man from each tribe to spy out the Land of Canaan.

Q. There has been some comment that budget cutbacks have hurt intelligence gathering to the point where Secretary of State Kissinger goes into talks with the Russians with inadequate information. Is there any truth in that?

A We obviously are suffering budgetary pressures from inflation. I think we are still giving a very good intelligence product to our Government. I have great confidence in it.

There have been some projects that we have turned down because they were totally out of reach financially. These have been in the category of things that would have made our intelligence more complete, but I don't think that we

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National Security Council in session. Mr. Colby, far left, may suggest covert operations by CIA in a country causing "high-level concern" as a way to "implement national policy." He adds: "If the proposal is approved, we carry it out. It's part of our job."

SPOTLIGHT ON CIA

(interview continued from preceding page)

have yet dropped below a danger line. I don't think it has imperiled our ability to negotiate.

However, as we look ahead a few years, we do have a problem coming up because of the inflationary squeeze. We've tried to respond to this by focusing our effort on the more-important things and dropping off the things that we may have needed in a different world.

Q. Where have you been able to cut back?

A. Luckily, today we are not required to maintain the scale of effort that we did in Southeast Asia, for example. Our problems in some of the other parts of the world are more manageable than they were when we were deeply concerned about a large number of countries that were under pressure of Communist subversion or insurgency. The impact on the world balance then could have been quite substantial if any one country had made a change in political direction.

Today, I think the world balance is a little more stable, at least with respect to major military threats to our country.

The real challenge for intelligence is to provide the kind of information that enables us to negotiate and enables us to anticipate future developments in countries that would be of great importance to us. Obviously, the subject of economics has become more important in the past few years. Terrorism has become a threat to the safety of our citizens. Also, the narcotics problem has grown in the past few years. But other situations correspondingly have declined, and we've been able to compensate.

Q. Mr. Colby, the CIA has been widely criticized for its involvement in Watergate—

A. The CIA did two wrong things in the Watergate affair: The first was providing Howard Hunt paraphernalia for use in his work for the White House. The second was providing White House employes the psychological profile of Daniel Ellsberg. They weren't earthshaking, but they were wrong. We shouldn't have done them, and we have told our employes that we won't do them again.

Q. If someone called today from the White House and asked the CIA to do something improper, what could you do about it?

A. Well, that's very clear. In my confirmation hearing on July 2 last year, I said that if I was ordered to do something improper, I would object and quit if necessary. That's easy. Also our employes have been instructed that if they have any question about anything that they are asked to do, they are to come to me.

If anybody really tried to misuse the CIA in the future, I think the organization would explode from inside. It really would. And that's good, because it's the best protection we have against this kind of problem.

Q. Do you operate at all inside the United States?

A. We have no internal-security functions or police or law-enforcement powers. It is clear that our function is only foreign intelligence.

What do we do inside the United States?

We have a large building up on the Potomac River with a lot of employes. In order to know something about them before we hire them, we conduct security investigations. We also make contracts with people around the country to supply us with things that we can use in our activities abroad. And we have contracts for research projects so that we can expand the base of our knowledge.

We have a service in our agency that talks to Americans who may have knowledge of some foreign situation that they are willing to share with their Government. We identify ourselves as representatives of the CIA, and we assure these Americans that they will be protected as a source—and we will do so. But we don't pay them and we don't conduct clandestine operations to obtain such intelligence from Americans.

We have some support structures in this country for our work abroad. We also collect foreign intelligence from foreigners in America. This is intelligence about foreign countries and has nothing to do with protecting the internal security of this country against those foreigners. That is the job of the FBI, with which we have a clear understanding and good co-operation as to our respective functions.

Q. A number of Congressmen complain that there is no effective control over the CIA. Is there any reason why your agency shouldn't be subjected to tighter supervision?

A I think we have responded to Congress's right and desire to know about the details of our activities over the years in the form that Congress itself has arranged. Now, the arrangements we have with our oversight committees in Congress are a lot more intense today than in past years. Twenty years ago, all of this was considered a very secret affair. Today, Congress is much more demanding. We answer any questions our oversight committees ask, and I must volunteer to them matters they might not know to ask about. That's the way Congress wants it, and we are responding. If we didn't, we'd be in real trouble.

Q. Mr. Colby, do you feel that the effectiveness of the CIA is impaired by all the publicity that you've been getting lately about secret operations?

A Obviously this has raised questions among some of our foreign friends about the degree to which we can keep secrets. Leading officials of foreign governments have brought it up in discussions with me. Individuals who have worked with us in various parts of the world have indicated a disinclination to work with us any longer because of the very real dangers to them of exposure.

In that respect, we have been hurt. But I like the way our society runs. I think it is perhaps unique that the chief of intelligence has to be exposed, as he is in America. But we have a responsibility to the American people. We are as responsive as we can be and still run an intelligence service. We regularly brief newsmen on world situations, we talk publicly about our activities in general terms, and we release our information and assessments whenever we can. I think America gains a great deal of strength from this, even though it's a big change from traditional intelligence secrecy.

Q. How do leaks affect morale at the CIA?

A You have to draw a distinction between leaks that lead to criticism of our programs and policies and leaks that expose our people. I think that we can and should stand up to the criticism. But exposing our people can be very difficult and also very dangerous.

You will recall Mr. Mitrione, who was killed in Uruguay. [Dan Mitrione, a U. S. employe of the Agency for International Development assigned to train police in Uruguay, was kidnaped on July 31, 1970, and later killed by Tupamaro guerrillas.] He was murdered—that's the only word for it. He was alleged to have been a CIA officer, which he was not.

I think it is reckless to go around naming people as being identified with the CIA.

Q. Why can't you prevent former CIA officials from publishing books that reveal secrets of your agency and the names of secret agents?

A There are criminal penalties for people who reveal income-tax returns or census returns or even cotton statistics. But there are no similar criminal penalties for people who reveal the name of an intelligence officer or agent or an intelligence secret, unless they give it to a foreigner or intend to injure the United States. I think it's just plain wrong for us not to protect our secrets better.

I am charged in the National Security Act with the protection of intelligence sources and methods from unauthorized disclosure. But the only tool I have is the secrecy agreement we require our people to sign as a condition of employment.

We invoked this agreement against one of our ex-employes who wrote a book. We didn't censor his opinions or criticisms; we just tried to prevent him from revealing names of people and sensitive operations, some still going on. We are currently engaged in a civil action in the courts to determine whether we can enforce the agreement he made.

I recommended legislation that would make it possible for us to protect intelligence secrets more effectively. My recommendations would apply only to those of us who voluntarily sign an agreement that gives us access to these secrets; it would not impinge on First Amendment guarantees.

WIDE WORLD

Anti-Marxists in Chile protesting policies of the late President Allende. CIA acted "in the best interests of our country, and friendly elements in another."

Q. Mr. Colby, can we get back to the question of the necessity for the United States to maintain a big, secret intelligence operation in an era of détente?

A Yes—I didn't fully reply to that.

I feel it is essential to the protection of our country, not only our military security but also in the sense of security against the other problems we face overseas—economic pressures, terrorism, local problems that can start in various parts of the world and eventually involve us. Through our intelligence work we must anticipate these problems and take protective steps. If we don't know that another country is developing a particular threat, we can be caught very badly off base.

Beyond that, our intelligence work makes it possible to engage in negotiations. The SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Talks] agreement between U. S. and Russia is the most obvious example. Without the knowledge we had of Soviet weapons through our intelligence activities, it would not have been possible for us to negotiate.

We also have what I would call a peacekeeping role, which

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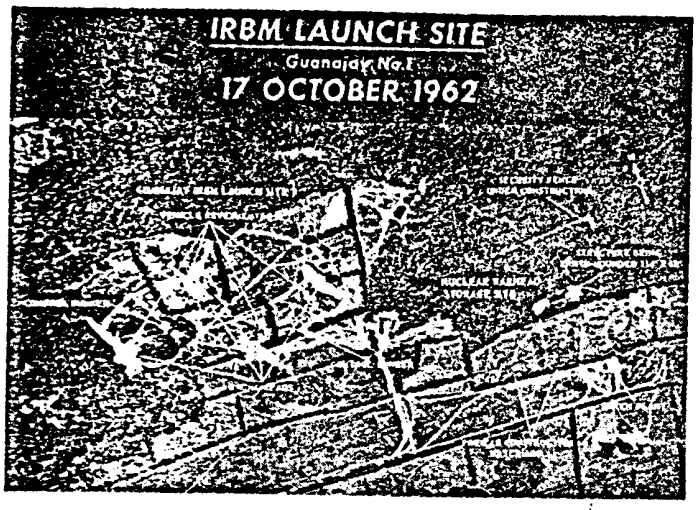

Missile sites in Cuba photographed from U-2.
"Technology has revolutionized intelligence. . . . We can monitor the 1972 SALT agreement without on-site inspection."

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I see of increasing importance in the years ahead. On a number of occasions, we have seen situations developing in a dangerous manner. By alerting our Government in good time, it has been possible for it to defuse these situations.

Q What part do spy satellites and other forms of modern technology play in your work of collecting intelligence?

A Quite frankly, technology has revolutionized the intelligence business. You have seen the photographs that came out of the U-2 operation over Cuba. You can realize the great importance of this development if you think back to the great debate in 1960 about a missile gap. People took strong positions on both sides, and we at the CIA were trying to determine what really was happening—whether a missile gap actually was opening up in favor of the Soviet Union. Today it would be impossible to have that debate because the facts are known.

This kind of technical intelligence made the SALT agreement possible. For years we insisted that any arms agreement would require inspection teams to monitor on the ground what the Russians were doing. Given their closed society, they wouldn't permit it. That stalled negotiations for years. Finally our "national technical means," as we politely call them, were improved to the extent we could tell the President and Congress that we can monitor the 1972 SALT agreement without on-site inspection teams, and we could make the agreement.

Q Some argue that satellites and other forms of technical intelligence can do the job and that there is no real need for clandestine agents ferreting out information. Do you agree?

A Not at all. Technical systems and open observation can tell us a great deal of what is physically there in closed societies. But they can't tell us what is going to be there in three or four years' time because of decisions that are being made in board rooms today. They can't tell us the internal political dynamics to allow us to assess how such a society is changing. And they can't tell us the intentions of people who may be bent on deceiving us. Intelligence of this sort can be obtained only by what we call "clandestine collection."

Q Looking at Russia's intelligence operation—the KGB—how does it compare with ours in scale and effectiveness?

A I think Soviet intelligence is going through a change—a good change. For years the big thrust was on stealing secrets. You remember the atom spies in America and all that sort of thing. In the past few years the Soviets have apparently become aware of the significance of assessment—the analysis function of intelligence. They've set up institutes to study the United States, realizing that the facts are easy to obtain in America. Their real problem is assessing what we might do, which is a terribly complicated and difficult intelligence problem.

Q Are you suggesting that the KGB no longer maintains spies in this country?

A Oh, they do—sure, they do. What I am saying is that they have moved from heavy dependence on espionage to greater reliance on more-normal ways of collecting and assessing intelligence. You can only say that's a change for the good; it should give them a more accurate picture of us, and it could hopefully reduce their espionage someday.

But the Soviets still run very extensive covert operations around the world. In any kind of foreign mission they send abroad—for example, delegations to international organizations—there always will be KGB people or people from GRU, their military intelligence. They also conduct a long-term program of training people and putting them in place under false identities to stay for many years. Colonel Abel [Rudolf Abel, a convicted Soviet spy, was returned to Russia in exchange for U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers in 1962] was an example of that. They have the benefit, of course, of indirect support from a variety of Communist parties around the world.

Q The Director of the FBI has said that there now are so many Soviet spies in America that he is having trouble trailing them. Why do we let so many in?

A We let them in as diplomats, commercial travelers, or in some other capacity. You have to realize that there has been a very large increase in the number of Soviet citizens in the United States, as compared with 10 years ago—partly as a result of détente. Now, if you get an increase in Soviet citizens in this country, you are inevitably going to get an increase in Soviet agents.

You see, in the Soviet Union the intelligence service is a very, very powerful institution because of its responsibilities for internal security as well as foreign intelligence. They have, in effect, merged the CIA, the FBI and our State police forces. And their intelligence service carries a very high degree of responsibility for preserving the power of the Soviet state, for party discipline and for public discipline. Consequently, the KGB has an institutional power that is totally different from the FBI and CIA combined in our country.

I think our system makes us a better and a stronger nation.

Dan Mitrione, an American murdered by guerrillas in Uruguay, "was alleged to have been a CIA officer, which he was not. It's reckless to name people as being identified with the CIA," says Mr. Colby.

AMERICA'S TOP INTELLIGENCE CHIEF SIZES UP WORLD'S TROUBLE SPOTS

The massive flow of information pouring into Washington requires William Colby, as Director of Central Intelligence, to make constant evaluations of fresh global developments bearing on U. S. interests.

Following, in his own words, is the appraisal Mr. Colby gave editors of "U. S. News & World Report" of tensions around the world, what they mean, what they could lead to, and the possible impact on the superpowers.

Strategic balance: U. S. vs. Russia. "The Soviets are developing new missile systems that will increase their strategic power considerably.

"But we do not see that in the foreseeable future they can dominate us. We have both reached the point where we can destroy each other, and the rest of the world—and they know it.

"You ask if the transfer of American technology to the Soviets is a matter of concern.

"We know that the military have a very high priority in Soviet decision-making. We have procedures that put limitations on giving them things of direct military value. And they have a problem of adapting our technology, which works because of our competitive system. That is a problem they've got to do some adjusting to.

"The Soviets are, of course, well behind us technologically. But they are able to challenge us in arms competition by taking a much-more-disciplined approach, particularly in assigning their best talent to arms work. One very interesting thing is to compare the Soviet military work in space with the Soviet civilian work in space. There is an obvious qualitative difference between the two. The military work is much, much better."

Détente: Why Soviets want it. "There are three main reasons for Soviet interest in promoting détente with the United States.

"First, they obviously want to prevent the kind of horrendous confrontation that is possible in this age of superweapons. The result of a nuclear exchange between us would be just so incredible now that they realize that something has to be done to avoid it.

"Secondly, they insist that they be recognized as one of the world's two superpowers and get the status that their strength implies. They might also benefit from a relaxation of the Western solidarity that characterized the 1950s and 1960s.

"Thirdly, they would like to accelerate their development in economic and technical terms, because as they look at the enormous power of the West—America particularly, but also the other countries—they see it moving at a tremendous rate. They hope to benefit by a greater degree of exchange and borrowing from that movement.

"Generally, the Soviet concern over their internal discipline is very high. This is partly a result of détente. They are nervous about what détente can do in terms of getting new thoughts and new political drives going within the Soviet Union. And they just don't want that to happen."

Soviet empire: Starting to crumble? "The Soviets face a problem as the states in Eastern Europe show signs of dissatisfaction over iron-fisted control from Moscow. The Russians have made it clear that they are not going to brook any substantial break in their Eastern European buffer zone.

"But, at the same time, they obviously have the problem of dealing with the new political ideas that are circulating in some of those countries—including demands for greater freedom of action.

"The old idea of total Soviet dominance and control is under challenge even from some of the Communist Party leaders in Eastern Europe."

Western Europe: Communist penetration. "One thing the Soviets want is Communist participation in the governments of Western Europe.

"This is in line with Communist ideology, which says that collapse of the European democratic system is inevitable, so that the movement of Communist forces from minority voices to participation will enable the Communists eventually to take over governments there and run them.

"Obviously, the Communists are playing a role in some countries by reason of the 25 per cent or 28 per cent of the votes they represent, and the difficulties of organizing governments among the fragmented non-Communist parties.

"There's been some increase in Communist Party influence. But several trends are running: One is the increase in European Communist Party influence in these countries; another is the apparent increase in the independence of European Communist parties from Moscow's control, and another is the non-Communist parties' reaction to this, to détente, and to each other. It's premature to tell where these trend lines are going to cross.

"We are certainly not saying, 'It doesn't matter whether the Communists participate in power.' What I'm saying is that this is a complicated, multifactored matter."

Cuba: Castro's policy now. "Fidel Castro's attempts to export his brand of Communist insurgency to other countries of Latin America didn't work.

"The Cubans have stressed in recent years the development of state-to-state relationships. And they've been quite successful with that new policy.

"As for Russia, the Soviets still rate Cuba as a geographic asset—no question about it. It's a very substantial geographic asset, but it's a very costly one to them in terms of the support the Cubans have required over the years.

"Cuba's present activities in Latin America—stressing state links—are, in general, of long-term use to Soviet interests."

War in Mideast: Quite possible. "Another round of war between Israel and the Arabs is possible—quite possible.

"It depends in great part on peacemaking diplomacy. Obviously, the Arab summit meeting at Rabat, which named the Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legitimate representative of Palestinians living on Arab land held by Israel, raises new difficulties.

"As for the Soviet role: They desire to play the role of a major power in the Middle Eastern area. They are endeavoring to express that through their naval presence, through their military-aid programs, through their economic aid, and so forth. Their policy right now is to keep that presence

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active, keep the capability of influencing the situation. But at the same time they have a considerable interest in continuing détente with the United States. They've got to try to go along a rather narrow track without abandoning their influence, but, on the other hand, not seeing the whole thing derail.

"The Soviets do get a certain amount of benefit from the economic troubles that afflict the West as a result of the oil problems, but they don't have to do much about that. It's taking place pretty much on its own. On the other hand, they have to realize that an aggressive move by them to cut off oil could cause a reaction on our side. It would be a very direct affront to any détente hopes that they have."